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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted at Miami-Dade Community College (MDCC) to assess the usefulness of the approach being employed at the college to provide decision makers with institutional research information which involves the large scale distribution of abstracts and/or full research reports to faculty and administrators. Surveys were distributed to all chairpersons and administrators (N=151), Faculty Senate Presidents (N=4), and a sample of administrative/professional staff members (N=24). Study findings, based on an overall response rate of 53%, included the following: (1) when asked to identify which categories of reports they used in decision making, 75% of the respondents indicated that they used student profile/enrollment reports, just over 50% used placement and follow-up reports, and 50% used institutional research reports which focused on the college's standards of academic progress; (2) over 80% of the respondents indicated that they read the abstracts of the reports as soon as they are received; (3) 45% filed the abstracts after reading them, and 25% ordered the full report; (4) only 3% of the respondents said they ignored the abstracts completely; (5) administrators were more likely than department chairs to want reports pertaining to research outside of their area of responsibility; (6) 90% said they shared information from the abstracts or reports with others; and (7) approximately 75% indicated that the abstract was the preferred format for receiving information. The survey instrument is appended. (LAL)

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Institutional Research

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Miami-Dade Community College

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WHO USES INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH AND WHY?

Research Report No. 85-22

May 1985

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John Losak, Dean

WHO USES INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH AND WHY?

Anyone who has ever associated with institutional researchers knows that the term "institutional research" has significantly different meaning depending on which institution is being considered. Clearly, before one can begin to address the question, "Who uses institutional research and why?", the term "institutional research" must be viewed in its proper perspective. That is to say, institutional research must be operationally defined. In many cases, for example, institutional research translates into one professional researcher with limited support staff serving the primary function of projecting and compiling student enrollment data. Furthermore, the function may comprise only those data gathering activities directly related to legislative mandate and little else. On the other hand, institutional research may be a highly visible force playing a significant role in both administrative and educational decision-making. In order for this to happen, considerable resources (both personnel and technological) must be committed to this purpose. Clearly, the extent to which institutional research is viewed as a valuable activity by the college or university dictates the level at which it will function.

Assuming that adequate resources are committed to the function of I.R., another factor which may determine the usefulness of this area is the research product itself. Not only does the quality of the research significantly influence the decision to utilize the services provided by institutional research, but the effectiveness with which research findings are disseminated to administrators and/or educators is equally important. Only when both the level of institutional research activity and the quality of the research product are taken into account can one begin to ask questions like "Who uses institutional research and why?"

At Miami-Dade Community College, an institution presently serving approximately 63,000 credit students annually, the Office of Institutional Research has had a long history that represents significant growth in

resources. In 1964, the office was established with a director and one secretary. Twenty years later, the same office required a budget close to \$300,000 and comprised a staff of six professional researchers, three paraprofessionals, two full-time assigned programmers and five clerical support positions. The office also utilizes the services of a word processing center for the preparation of most of its research documents.

Along with the dramatic changes in resources, the office has concentrated on improving the quality of the research product itself. In 1984, thirty-seven formal research reports were issued. The average report was approximately twenty-five pages long, and for almost every report written, an abstract summarizing the research findings was prepared. The abstracts, in fact, may be the most visible of the research products. In 1984, well over 6,000 abstracts were issued within the College. As a result, about 1,500 full reports were distributed based on requests from individuals who needed further information. The recipients were among more than 1,000 full-time professionals (faculty and administrators) presently employed by the College.

With such a large audience to serve, it was decided that a survey should be conducted in order to assess the usefulness of the approach being employed to provide decision-makers with institutional research information. Specifically, the office was interested in the following aspects of the research/decision-making process:

1. Which categories of research reports are being utilized most often by decision-makers?
2. What happens after an institutional research user receives an abstract and/or research report, and how does that relate to decision-making?
3. What are the preferred formats for getting research information?
4. What is the level of satisfaction among decision-makers with regard to the quality of research reports distributed during the past year?
5. What new ideas for research exist among decision-makers?

METHOD

Sample

The sample selected for the study comprised all chairpersons and administrators (N=151), Faculty Senate Presidents (N=4), and 24 administrative/professional staff members at Miami-Dade Community College. This sample constitutes the total abstract recipient group with the exception of the District Board of Trustees.

Procedure

A survey (Appendix A) was designed by several members from the Office of Institutional Research and was mailed to the sample via the College's inter-office mail system. Survey recipients were asked to respond to the survey and return it to the Office of Institutional Research within two weeks of its mailing. After the completed forms were returned, the data were processed and analyzed on an IBM-PC microcomputer running SPSS-PC. This software enabled the investigator to analyze the survey data in terms of total respondents as well as check for group differences between administrators and department chairpersons. The group comparisons were based on chi square analyses at the .05 level of significance. For the items which involved a rating scale, group means were compared on the basis of a t-test.

Results

Of the total 179 surveys distributed, 96 were mailed back to the office for a return rate of 53.6%. Surveys were completed by 42 department chairpersons, 43 administrators, 2 Faculty Senate Presidents, and 9 other professionals. The number of respondents in each sample category was consistent with the total proportion of each group being investigated.

The first group of items focused on the categories of research reports used for decision-making. The reports issued during 1984 comprised 6 general areas: Student Profile/Enrollment Reports, Placement and Follow-up Reports, Standards of Academic Progress Reports, Basic Skills Assessment research, CLAST research, and other miscellaneous research topics. The data revealed that over three-fourths of all respondents used Student Profile/Enrollment Reports for decision-making. There was no significant difference

between department chairpersons and administrators with regard to this finding.

Placement and follow-up reports were used by just over half of all respondents for decision-making, while 50% of the respondents indicated that they used institutional research reports which focus on the Standards of Academic Progress. Just under half reported that they utilized the studies related to the CLAST, and about the same number of respondents claimed to have used data related to Basic Skills Assessment. In each case, there was no significant difference between department chairpersons and administrators. Only 13% of the respondents specified other types of institutional research reports being used for decision-making. Interestingly, this was the only category that revealed a significant difference between department chairpersons and administrators, $\chi^2(1, N=85)=5.36, p<.05$. The proportion of administrators responding affirmatively was 20.9% compared to just 2.4% of the department chairpersons.

Several items focused on what happens after a decision-maker receives an abstract/research report. According to the results, over 80% of the respondents indicated that they read the abstracts as soon as they are received. About 45% of the respondents filed the abstracts after reading them, while about one-fourth ordered the full research report. Only about three percent ignored the abstracts completely. When asked about receiving the full reports, over half (54.2%) said they read them to see if they can make use of the information. Another 18.8% claimed to read the reports to stay abreast of current research topics, while just over 20% set the report aside for later reference. In each of these cases, there was no significance difference between administrators and department chairpersons.

In response to whether they preferred to receive only those reports related to their areas of decision making, over 68% said "no." However, when examined in terms of administrators versus department chairpersons, administrators were more likely to want reports pertaining to research outside their areas of responsibility (79.1%) than were department chairpersons (61.9%), $\chi^2(2, N=85)=6.57, p<.05$. While this was found to be statistically significant, it should be noted that in each group the

majority of decision-makers were concerned about research issues that focused on other areas.

Approximately three-fourths of all respondents said "yes" when asked if they had ever requested a full research report based on the information presented in an abstract. Significantly more administrators than department chairpersons responded "yes" to this particular item (83.7% versus 61.9%) indicating that while the abstract may be sufficient for many department chairpersons, administrators tend to need more information, $\chi^2(1, N=85)=4.07, p<.05$.

Almost 90% of all respondents indicated that they shared information from the abstracts or research reports with others. Seventy-two percent shared information with faculty while 65% shared information with administrators. Interestingly a full 39% reported sharing information with colleagues at other institutions. No significant differences were found with respect to these items.

While over half of all respondents reported having called Institutional Research about a concern or question, a significantly larger proportion of administrators said they called than did department chairpersons (65.1% versus 38.1%), $\chi^2(3, N=85)=10.09, p<.05$. Finally, more than half of all respondents said they would make use of a form attached to abstracts or reports for soliciting ideas and comments. In this case, no significant difference was found between the two groups.

A number of items on the survey focused on the preferred formats for getting research information. Respondents were asked to rank six formats by indicating their first preferred format as number one and the least preferred as number six. As a result, three-fourths of all respondents indicated that the abstract is the most preferred format while one-half indicated that oral presentations would be the least preferred format. In terms of overall mean rankings for the six formats, the order of preference was: abstracts ($M=1.39$), graphs/charts ($M=2.59$), newsletters ($M=3.22$), detailed tables ($M=3.60$), full reports ($M=4.22$), and oral presentations ($M=5.24$). T-tests were employed and revealed no significant differences

between administrators and department chairpersons except in the case of newsletters--department chairpersons ranked this format more than a full point higher than administrators ($\bar{M}=2.69$ versus $\bar{M}=3.76$), $t(72)=3.64$, $p < .001$.

Another area of concern to the insitutional research staff was the level of satisfaction among decision-makers with regard to the quality of research reports distributed during the past year. Respondents were asked to rate the research reports in terms of usefulness as an aid in decision-making, amount of information included, readability, presentation of results, methodology, background information related to the topic, and interpretation of findings. The mean ratings were based on a scale of one to five, with one being very dissatisfied and five being very satisfied. The resultant mean ratings were: readability ($\bar{M}=4.40$), results presentation ($\bar{M}=4.32$), amount of information ($\bar{M}=4.24$), usefulness for decision making ($\bar{M}=4.14$), interpretation of findings ($\bar{M}=3.98$), and background information ($\bar{M}=3.81$).

Finally, the survey asked the respondents for new ideas for research and/or other comments. The majority of research questions raised by decision-makers dealt with student outcomes, with many focusing on retention and success in college-level coursework. Most other research questions focused on curriculum studies or student enrollment trends and demographics. The comments are presented for the reader at the end of the report. (Appendix B).

DISCUSSION

By and large, the survey provided a number of important findings which, if translated into practice, could improve the effectiveness of institutional research within the context of decision-making. For example, the most useful reports produced by institutional research appear to be those related to student enrollment. Clearly, this is the lifeblood of the institution and demands constant attention among decision-makers. Placement and follow-up data are also receiving a fair amount of attention. Since this is probably due to greater program accountability at the state level,

program managers will be keeping closely in touch with these data. Both categories should be high on the list of institutional research priorities.

The survey also revealed that decision-makers are more likely to read about institutional research findings if they are presented in a condensed format such as an abstract. It appears that abstracts accompanied by graphs and/or charts may be the most effective way to communicate research findings to an audience that probably won't have time to read and synthesize longer presentations of data. Not surprisingly, the survey pointed up the need among administrators to occasionally see more detailed information, however, than that required by department chairpersons. Each of these findings would seem to support the approach taken by Institutional Research at Miami-Dade Community College with respect to disseminating information efficiently (by way of the abstract) as well as in greater depth when required (by way of the full research report).

The survey results also reflected some interesting differences between administrators and department chairpersons with regard to their relationship with institutional research. First of all, administrators expressed the greatest need to see research findings not directly related to their areas, although a substantial number from each group was so inclined. Furthermore, administrators are more likely to call institutional research for information than are the department chairpersons. Both findings indicate that decision-makers depend heavily on the institutional research office as a source of up-to-date information with administrators indicating the most spontaneous need for support.

To the extent that the research reports issued at Miami-Dade were rated fairly high in each aspect, it may be concluded that the report format is indeed effective. However, institutional researchers must take greater care in providing decision-makers with background information related to the underlying issues. Also, researchers need to pay closer attention to the interpretation of research findings; decision-makers may disagree with our conclusions or find them to be inadequate. Finally, the survey disclosed a concern about student outcomes in terms of future research that decision-makers would like to see addressed by institutional research. The

considerable number of comments and/or questions raised about student outcomes may indicate that decision-makers are satisfied with the extent to which institutional research has investigated pertinent administrative issues and would prefer to see a greater focus on educational research questions.

The answer to the question "Who uses Institutional Research and why?", then, seems to be as follows: administrators and department chairpersons are using the services provided by institutional research. Administrators are using the information for staying abreast of research findings in general as well as for detailed information for decision-making; department chairpersons, on the other hand, are using the summary data to a greater extent and less detailed information. Much of the information produced by institutional research is being shared with others including faculty and colleagues at other institutions. However, it is also clear that part of the reason why decision-makers at Miami-Dade are using institutional research is because the abstract/research report approach is an effective one that should definitely continue.

April 17, 1985

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Institutional Research Abstract Recipients

FROM: John Losak 

SUBJECT: INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH SURVEY

Approximately two years ago, Institutional Research began distributing report abstracts as a way of disseminating research findings to a broad audience at Miami-Dade. As a recipient of these abstracts, you are familiar with the process for obtaining full reports which calls for returning a portion of the research report abstract to this office. In 1984, a total of 6,600 abstracts were distributed representing 30 full reports. During the same period, 1,702 copies or reports were sent to individuals either as a result of direct request or because the report was thought appropriate for a particular person or area.

It appears to be a good time to assess the impact this process has had and to look at some ways of improving our service. Please take a few moments to complete the attached questionnaire. Your response will help us establish future directions for dissemination and content of reports from Institutional Research.

JL:ab

Attachment

PLEASE RETURN THIS SURVEY BY APRIL 30th TO:
OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH
ROOM 1138
SOUTH CAMPUS

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH SURVEY

The following questions have been designed to assess the usefulness of the reports from Institutional Research in your decision-making and to discover ways we could improve our services to you. Please select the best response to the following questions.

- ___ 1. In which area do you make most of your decisions?
- a. classroom instruction
 - b. student and personnel service programs
 - c. administrative planning and budget decisions
 - d. other (specify: _____)

Which categories of I.R. reports are you using for decision-making?
(Check all that apply)

- ___ 2. Student/Enrollment Profiles
- ___ 3. Placement and Follow-up Reports
- ___ 4. Standards of Academic Progress
- ___ 5. Basic Skills Assessment
- ___ 6. CLAST Research reports
- ___ 7. Other (specify: _____)

- ___ 8. When I receive a research abstract, I usually:
- a. read it immediately and file it
 - b. read it immediately and throw it away
 - c. read it immediately and order report
 - d. set it aside until I find time to read it
 - e. ignore it and throw it away

- ___ 9. When I receive a full research report, I usually:
- a. read it to see if I can make use of the information
 - b. read it to stay abreast of research topics under study
 - c. set it aside until such time that I may need it for reference

- ___ 10. Do you prefer to receive only reports which focus on your areas of decision-making? Please explain.
- a. Yes b. No

- ___ 11. Have you ever requested a full report based on the information received in the abstract?
- a. Yes b. No

- ___ 12. If you answered "No" to question 11, why have you not requested full reports?
- a. the abstracts provided sufficient information
 - b. the abstracts have not addressed areas with which I am concerned
 - c. other (please specify: _____)
- ___ 13. Have you ever shared information from the research reports or abstracts with other individuals?
- a. Yes b. No

If you answered "Yes" to question 13, with whom have you shared information?
(Check all that apply)

- ___ 14. Faculty
- ___ 15. Administrators
- ___ 16. Colleagues at other institutions
- ___ 17. Have you ever called I.R. with questions, requests, or comments?
Please explain.
- a. Yes b. No
- ___ 18. If you had a form attached to abstracts or reports soliciting your ideas and comments, would you make use of it? Please explain.
- a. Yes b. No

How do you prefer to have research information presented to you?
(Please rank from high to low where "1" indicates your first preference and "6" indicates your last.)

- ___ 19. Detailed tables which I can peruse and distill for my own needs
- ___ 20. Written abstracts which highlight results
- ___ 21. Graphs and charts which display trends and differences
- ___ 22. Oral presentations by I.R. staff where research results would be discussed
- ___ 23. Full research reports
- ___ 24. Periodic newsletters

Consider the quality of the research reports you have received within the past year. Then rate the reports using the following scale:

- | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--|----------------------|--------------------------|---------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| | very
dissatisfied | somewhat
dissatisfied | Neutral | somewhat
satisfied | very
satisfied |
| ___ 25. Usefulness as aid in decision-making | | | | | |
| ___ 26. Amount of information included | | | | | |
| ___ 27. Readability | | | | | |
| ___ 28. Presentation of results (including statistics) | | | | | |
| ___ 29. Methodology | | | | | |
| ___ 30. Background information related to topic | | | | | |
| ___ 31. Interpretation of findings | | | | | |
| ___ 32. What is your current position at M-DCC? | | | | | |
| a. faculty | | | | | |
| b. department chairperson | | | | | |
| c. other administrative position | | | | | |
| d. other _____ | | | | | |
| ___ 33. How long have you been in your current position? | | | | | |
| a. less than one year | | | | | |
| b. one to three years | | | | | |
| c. more than three but less than five years | | | | | |
| d. five or more years | | | | | |
| ___ 34. In the future, what kinds of issues would you like to see addressed by I.R.? | | | | | |

Other comments

Responses to Item 34 from the
Institutional Research Survey

1. Non-credit student profiles.
2. Effectiveness of remediation activities on student performance.
3. Information on Medical Hospital Community needs utilization of graduates.
4. Statistics about results - for example - How much better did a student do after taking the 3rd English Course, etc.
5. Longitudinal follow-up on alumni placement in selected areas of professional/technical studies.
6. Program/curricular evaluation.
7. The issues selections have been excellent.
8. Community information - Resources High Enrollment Information.
9. I cannot think of any new issues at the moment.
10. Information on success such as completion (in course, program, etc.) and placement.
11. Student enrollment in various types of classes to support Board rationales, i.e., architecture, aviation simulator, biology, secretary careers, medical technology, etc. where various equipment is constantly ordered for student use.
12. Demographic and enrollment statistics for the area of South Dade. Financial and housing information is also needed.
13. Changes in student performance on entry and attrition rates at M-DCC.
14. Continued follow-up on this impact of the reform. Continued research in methods and strategies to deal with the problem of performance by minorities.
15. You're doing fine. The three major college-wide councils--Academic Affairs, Students Services, and Administrative Services--should be your main source of input.
16. Financial aid related information.
17. Among graduating high school seniors, who goes to Florida International University, University of Miami, M-DCC, out of State, Broward Community College, others.

18. Student responses to various teaching styles.
19. Retention and attrition issues.
20. Some research in business trends and needs.
21. 1) Follow-up on MAPS results and student performance. 2) Continue studies on CLAST performance in writing.
22. 1) Persistence studies--impact of financial aid to retention.
2) Impact of instruction.
23. Comparative data on salary of college employees in same job class, considering years of experience in a related job or at the college analytical information re: turnover, why people leave the college, college salary and level structure.
24. Relationship between attrition and developmental courses--are we losing students because of excessive involvement in developmental courses.
25. Something in alumni--follow-up on our graduates.
26. I would like to see a current study of the retention of the undecided student. How many credits before students declare a major or withdraw from school.
27. Internal M-DCC administrative issues (e.g., staffing allocations, position classification).
28. Those which have implications for instructional strategy or program policy.
29. CLAST materials, enrollment trends, analysis of students' degree of satisfaction with instruction and counseling.
30. The number of enrollments in prerequisite courses for specific programs and the predictability for program success.
31. Develop a succinct "Trends" newsletter on topic areas--CLAST, Basic Skills (College Preparatory) Enrollment, Placement/Follow-up--State and National trends.
32. Basically, I review the Research Reports for the following reasons:
1) To enhance my knowledge regarding M-DCC--the students, staff, philosophy, etc.; 2) To provide knowledge related to my area--specifically, how the facilities can aid the educational process; facility needs related to student needs, etc. Any issues that might impact upon the above.
33. Continue studies of curriculum and student progress relationships (CLAST, Basic Skills, etc.) Follow-up of graduates.
34. Effectiveness of developmental courses for success in college level courses.

35. 1) Those focusing on the educational program. 2) Follow-up of "leavers."
36. Continue as is.
37. Issues related to the occupational area! The effects of the additional general education courses on our enrollments (A.A. and A.S. programs) (We were the largest area of the college before all the general education revisions!)
38. Data on continuing education students age, subjects trends, zip codes of non-credit students.
39. 1) Library use match will success in college--GPA and graduation achievement. 2) Faculty use of educational technology: Computers, A.V. materials and equipment with an evaluation--by students--of the use of technology in and beyond classroom. 3) Student use of the Library Circulation System as an on-line catalog.
40. I would like to see a list of all computer programs and print-outs, with a short description of the contents of each of the computer programs and printouts. For example, including but not limited to the following: 1) Computer Program SRA 13J00; 2) Enrollment information by course and program; 3) Net change (at comparable time) on enrollment statistics; by program and course for major terms; compared to same term; at same time; in previous year; 4) Opening term reports for the information closing term reports for the information.
41. Demographics which will assist in developing media for recruitment and retention.
42. Correlations, e.g., CGP's and MAPS for specific population (ethnic).
43. Evaluation of success of former M-DCC students after transfer in total by institution to which transferred as well as by such groups based on M-DCC categories. Aside from employment surveys and CLAST results, such studies potentially could provide what, to me, would be the most meaningful and noted evaluation of the effectiveness of our academic problems. Otherwise, the production in terms of volume is tremendous. I sometimes wonder why some of the reports are produced, but then I am rather removed from the area of student studies and also realize that the office serves a variety of services and interests. Have a nice day and keep up the good work!
44. The quality and quantity of research reports from IR has improved with the addition of new researchers in recent years. Keep up the good work. IR is an invaluable asset to this institution.
45. IR Information provides a great service.
46. The current approach is very good.
47. IR is outstanding.

48. What should the college administration expect of the occupational areas with the additional math and English requirements? (Enrollment wise). Are the CLAST requirements causing students to switch from A.A. to A.S. degrees in order to graduate?
49. Can we develop appropriate mailing lists from credit students list for non-credit programming? For example: business majors, art majors, social science majors, literature/humanities students.
50. I wish that the data from your reports were used more meaningfully by decision makers
51. I am very pleased that this questionnaire has been sent out since for some time I have been intending to write a memo praising the abstract/report approach you are taking. The fact that I have not ordered a full report should not reflect on the need of your service.

ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE
FOR JUNIOR COLLEGES
MAY 15 1986
